

"To promote understanding and appreciation of the religious and spiritual values which abide in the processes and relationships of agriculture and rural life; to define their significance and relate them to the Christian enterprise at home and abroad."

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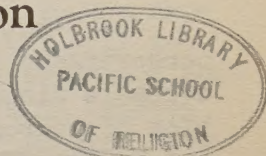
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The Church in China's Rural Reconstruction

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For nearly twenty years "rural reconstruction" has been the most important social movement in China. It was begun in sporadic efforts to tackle isolated problems such as illiteracy, backward practices in agriculture, or inability and lack of desire on the part of the masses to participate in local self-government. It gained coherence and unity as its leaders gradually realized that life is one organic whole and that no one set of problems can be successfully solved while others are ignored. Prominent among the early advocates of this correlated approach was Y. C. James Yen, under whose leadership a number of natural and social scientists started the famous "Tingsien Experiment." Here, for the first time, rural life in all its phases was made the object of expert observation and systematic experimentation. Their devotion and success inspired other groups to undertake similar experiments in many parts of the country. A general pattern of rural reconstruction soon emerged in which literacy education, improvement of the people's means of livelihood, public health work, community organization, and the reform of the local government were salient features. By 1932 the movement had inspired such faith in the Central Government that its Ministry of Interior ordered the establishment in every province of an "experiment hsien" with the hope of developing this basic governmental agency into a medium for rural reconstruction. By 1935 it had exerted sufficient influence upon the leading colleges and universities of the country for most of them to incorporate "rural" courses into their curricula and to conduct rural service centers in the localities in which they were situated. The culmination of this process of integration of rural reconstruction forces came in the spring of 1937 when all the leading groups in the field, including five universities in Nanking and in North China, formed the North China Council of Rural Reconstruction that would be the organ through which the rural reconstruction movement would make its concerted impact upon the national life as a whole.

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This paper was originally prepared as a chapter for a book, China Rediscovered Her West, published by the Missionary Education Movement, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York, but arrived too late to be included. It fits in admirably with this series of Bulletins. It will strengthen the bonds of this Christian Fellowship and it should be a challenge to the Christian movement in all lands.

At this very hour when the future seemed to hold the greatest promise for the rural reconstruction movement, the present war burst upon us. Tingsien, only a few hours' travel from the Marco Polo Bridge, was lost within a few months. Other strongholds of the movement, on the eastern seaboard and in the north, followed in rapid succession; by the end of the first year of hostilities all except one or two places had fallen under Japanese control. Years of scientific research and experimentation had to be abandoned; people long accustomed to the benevolent and enlightening influence of an indigenous movement had to be left to the tender mercies of Japanese military occupation. Of all the losses sustained by the Chinese people few are more tragic than this disruption of the rural reconstruction movement.

But its undaunted leaders have refused to give up. With forethought and perseverance and with careful and statesmanlike planning they have channelled the inevitable dispersion of their forces from the occupied areas into effective concentration of personnel in free China. Here in the vast hinterland provinces of the West and Southwest, destined to become the Piedmont of a regenerated China, they have started new demonstration centers, rendered aid to the various provinces in the training and organization of the masses and contributed their experience and wisdom to the most responsible authorities in the highest state councils. Although the rural reconstruction movement has been forced out of its original home, it has met with a thousand unexpected opportunities in its new field of operations, and opened up new vistas compared with which even the most ambitious of their former plans seem timid and conservative. To this process of expansion and accelerated growth a number of factors have contributed.

First and foremost, the magnificent part played by the farmers of China in the present struggle for national existence has awakened the educated classes of the country to a new sense of the fundamental importance and unlimited possibilities of mass education. Though unlettered and disorganized, the farmers of China have made this war of resistance possible. This has been an important eye-opener to the intelligentsia of the land. If, when huddled together in all haste, they could thus withstand the onslaught of one of the great military powers of the modern world what would they not accomplish if they were adequately enlightened and effectively organized! To make sure that this precious lesson, paid for dearly with millions of lives, will not be forgotten when the war is over, the Government emphasizes constructive measures for national upbuilding with as much vigor and determination as it does those for carrying out the war to a successful conclusion. It may sound incredible to the Western world that a country fighting for its very existence should at the same time attempt to initiate universal compulsory education, to inaugurate universal suffrage, to overhaul the local government system, and to carry out other measures of permanent internal reform. Yet this is what is actually taking place in China today. Under the baptism of fire the new China is coming of age in national consciousness and in public spirit. This progress is at once the result of the rural reconstruction movement and also a new invigorating force for its continued development.

Secondly, war conditions have necessitated the decentralization of the nation's productive activities and have enriched the economic content of the rural reconstruction program. Prior to the war, the economic aspects of rural reconstruction were largely agrarian. Industry, true to its prototype in the West, had clung to a few large urban centers. But during the war, an overwhelming number of factories in the occupied areas have been destroyed. To rehabilitate refugee workers from these areas, to produce substitutes for consumers' goods formerly imported from abroad, and to increase the nation's productive capacity for military and economic resistance to Japanese aggression a new type of light industry has been started in the rural districts all over free China. As one travels over the countryside one constantly hears the clatter of machinery and the humming of workmen, sometimes coming from the most unexpected corners. Some of these new shops give employment to scores of workmen; in some,

farmers and their families carry on new sidelines where they live. Some of the larger establishments represent investments of private capital; a significant number are owned and managed cooperatively by the workers themselves. They engage in industries that range from oil refining and machine manufacturing to spinning, weaving, leather tanning, carpentry, and soap and candle-making. From the viewpoint of rural reconstruction, the significance of this new development does not lie exclusively in its contribution to China's economic strength, important as that is for a warring nation, but also in the fact that it gives a foretaste of the kind of economic order the movement has envisaged, an economic order that will not divorce industry from agriculture but will weave them both into an integrated system of production; will not transplant the farmer into the cold impersonal conglomeration of a factory but will leave him on the soil and in his most cherished human relationships; will not make the workman a mere automaton or cog in the wheel, but will give scope to his creative faculty; will not divide human beings into hostile camps of employers and employees, of producers and consumers, or of middlemen and consumers, but will make them all partners in an economy of mutual aid and brotherhood. China's war-born industries have not yet wrought this miracle, but they have laid the foundation on which such an economic structure can be built by rural workers in post-war reconstruction.

Lastly, the leaders of rural reconstruction have been conspicuous because they are the only scholars willing to mingle with and work for their less privileged cousins in the rural areas. Most educated people prefer the better facilities and the more remunerative opportunities of the city. Since the war, living in the city has become highly dangerous because of the constant threat of indiscriminate attack from the air. The wholesale exodus of the educated classes from the cities has resulted in cultural penetration of the country such as is unknown in history. Leaving their city homes for the purely negative purpose of avoiding meaningless loss of life and property, these intellectual refugees have become unintentional participants in the movement of rural upbuilding. To educate their children they have started better schools in the country, which farmers' sons and daughters also attend. To safeguard their health they have introduced to their ignorant neighbors the basic ideas of personal and public hygiene. Other forms of cultural diffusion and improvement have followed. In an increasing number of places, the post office, the telephone, the daily newspaper, the regular passenger bus, things known there only by hearsay one or two years ago, are now within everybody's reach. As yet, these things are superimposed upon the life of rural China, but they are there to stay. And it needs no prophet to predict that their continued use will profoundly change the ideas, attitudes, customs, and techniques of the rural communities. To direct these changes into constructive channels toward the achievement of better life, individually, socially, and spiritually, for the rural millions of China, is a challenge to every social agency.

Thus the story of rural reconstruction in wartime China is the story of bane turned into blessing, partly by the convergence of unforeseen circumstances, but chiefly by the practice of human perseverance, statesmanship, and sacrificial spirit.

To relate the experiences of these Christian groups is to reiterate the same story, although in certain details there are significant differences. Like their secular allies, before the war the great majority of Christian rural workers were located in the North and the East. Like them, they have evacuated their former fields of service and have followed the westward trek into Szechwan and other western provinces. In only a few places projects under missionary leadership have found it possible to continue on a much reduced scale, under the restrictions and uncertainties of the "new order." Such is the case with the rural service institute of the American Board Mission at Tunghsien (Tungchow), near Peiping, directed by the Rev. J. A. Hunter. Professor Gerald F. Winfield, Dr. Lois Witham, and Miss Mary Katharine Russell of Cheeloo University have been able to remain in Tsinan, although all teaching work of the University has moved to Chengtu (capital of Szechwan Province), and to carry on their ex-

perimental work in agricultural sanitation and in nutrition. Not all projects have been so fortunate. The group of devoted and enterprising rural missionaries of the United Church of Canada, who had achieved remarkable results in promoting rural cooperatives in North Honan, all had to leave their field. Even American-sponsored projects have not all escaped complete disruption. The well known Fanchiachung Experiment under the able leadership of Dr. Hugh Hubbard of the American Board Mission at Paoting, Hopei, has been forced to suspend all its activities. This is very tragic; for this project, though of very short history, is generally recognized as one of the most promising and instructive projects in the field of rural missions.

The most outstanding contribution of Christian forces to the rural reconstruction movement in China has been made through Christian institutions, especially through the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations, through hospitals, theological seminaries and universities. The country has long depended upon the University of Nanking for leadership in agriculture; Yenching, in social administration; Cheeloo, in rural medicine; Ginling College, in women's training and organization. The rural experiments or service centers of each of these institutions excelled in one or more fields of service: in agricultural extension at Wukiang (Nanking); in women's organization at Tsinghochen (Yenching); in cooperatives at Lungshan (Cheeloo); and in general community development and comprehensive church program at Shunhwachen (Nanking Seminary). The Y.M.C.A. center at Weiting, near Soochow; the Y.W.C.A. center at Fushan, near Cheeloo; Toishan in Kwangtung and Sungshu near Nanking were other projects of substantial achievement and historical significance. It pains one's heart to think that, without exception, they have all been rent asunder by this war.

But again, as one turns from this gloomy picture in the North and the East to the rediscovered West, one begins to catch rays of new hope against an ever-widening horizon. Except for Yenching, all the institutions of Christian higher education mentioned above are now operating on the hospitable campus of the West China Union University in Chengtu, a university which before the coming of her sister institutions from "downriver" was already leading the province in public health, horticulture and animal husbandry; and leading the whole country in dentistry. Now, reinforcing and supplementing one another in the same locality, these Christian universities exert a major influence upon the movement of rural reconstruction. The rural centers at Jenshow, conducted by the University of Nanking, by Ginling College, and by the Y.W.C.A., with the help of the Canadian Mission which has work in that area, are rapidly developing into fine laboratories of research and experimentation for students looking to rural service as a life profession.

Rural work under more direct auspices of the Church is also manifesting new vigor and vitality. Five of the Canadian group from Honan are now in the West. Two of them, the Rev. J. C. Mathieson and the Rev. H. A. Boyd, will be engaged particularly in the Christian Cooperative Movement. The Rural Church Department of Nanking Seminary, under the leadership of Dr. Frank W. Price, is working in close cooperation with West China Union Theological College in the effort to build up the rural churches in the province and to train ministerial and lay leadership. Thus far the chief emphasis has been on the training of lay leadership. All denominations working in the province have benefitted from this service, a timely contribution to the church in West China which is numerically weak as compared with the Christian work in the country as a whole, and which in the past has confined its work largely to the cities and market towns.

For a number of years the Canadian Mission Press in Chengtu has made a unique contribution by producing large quantities of tracts, both for evangelism and for Christian social service. Some of them, especially those on health education prepared under the direction of Dr. Wallace Crawford, have even found their way downriver. This work has been kept up during the war. Recently a large number of selected tracts

have been distributed through the Christian Spiritual Mobilization Movement Campaign and the National Christian Council staff in West China. In addition, the Rural Church Department of Nanking Seminary has recently produced a series of pamphlets ranging in subject matter from scientific agriculture to the management of a village church. These are helpful little manuals, for they are based on studies and experiments conducted by qualified workers over a number of years. At present the Christian Farmer, the little fortnightly magazine prepared in simple language for the use of country people, is also published in Chengtu. Prior to the war the circulation of this paper was 37,000, a figure never reached before in this country in the field of Christian literature and attained by only a very few periodicals of any description. Since practically all of this circulation was in North China, it can now reach but a negligible fraction of its former constituency. Its present 7,000 subscribers are all new friends made during its first year of operation from Chengtu.

Two recent projects are significant because they indicate the influence that a forward-looking Christian Church can exert upon the national life of the China that is in the making. The first is that of the Church of Christ in China for the tribes people in the West and Southwest who are a potential asset to the nation and who present a serious problem of internal administration. Although the problem has been flirted with through the centuries, it has never before been tackled with real insight and statesmanship. Government agencies as well as private academic bodies did send teams of investigators, teachers, and organizers to the mountainous districts of the tribes to explore the possibilities of absorbing them into the main stream of Chinese national life. But real cultural assimilation and racial harmony cannot be attained by artificial manipulations of a purely political nature. They must issue from contacts and interactions based on genuine mutual respect and sustained by disinterested care for the well-being of the racial minorities. Here religious bodies have a distinctive contribution to make. Before his untimely death in December 1939, Dr. C. Y. Cheng, world-renowned General Secretary of the Church of Christ in China, cherished the vision of an indigenous Chinese missionary enterprise which would serve, enlighten and evangelize these people. His vision so inspired some of the prominent Christians in the Central Government that through their good offices a substantial grant was made to the Church for the development of this work. His passing is a serious blow to this infant project; but, happily, he has left it in entirely competent hands. Dean William B. Djang of Cheeloo University is concurrently director of this work. Under his leadership a comprehensive program has been mapped out for a number of service centers to be started in typical tribes areas in the western provinces. A fine group of Christian young men and women have responded to the call for service. Tsakolao has been chosen for the first center. It is a trading point near Lifan, Szechwan, where the Szechwan Synod of the Church (West China Mission of the United Church of Canada) has maintained home mission work for a number of years.

The second is the effort of the National Christian Council to Christianize cooperatives. The numerical growth of cooperatives during recent years in China is an amazing story. In 1933 there were 5,335 cooperatives in the whole country. In five years the movement has increased more than tenfold. In 1938 there were 55,362 societies in twenty provinces. Practically all of them, 97.35 per cent, were cooperative credit societies. In free China, since the war, the cooperative movement has grown even more rapidly, especially producers' cooperatives in the West and Northwest. The "Chinese Industrial Cooperatives" alone organized more than twelve hundred societies in just over a year. Cooperatives are helping to break the deadly economic stranglehold of the present crisis. Given proper direction and guidance, they will usher in the new social and economic order.

But under secular sponsorship and governmental regimentation, cooperation is looked upon merely as a business technique. Its vast spiritual significance and the spiritual requirements essential to its success tend to be minimized or lost

sight of entirely. Consequently, while cooperatives are making remarkable strides in quantitative development they are lagging behind in spirit and quality. The Christian Church still does not adequately recognize either its own responsibility for the spiritual revitalization of the cooperative movement, or the value of cooperatives as a channel for an enlarged evangelism. Any gap allowed to develop between the Christian and the cooperative movements would be a deplorable loss to both.

Realizing the challenge of this situation, the National Christian Council is making the Christianization of cooperatives a major task of its branch office in the West. In the winter of 1939 it organized a standing committee, composed of fifteen church leaders and Christian laymen prominent in the field of cooperation, to make plans and provide supervision. The general purpose is to serve as a clearing house for cooperatives within the Christian Church and as a source of spiritual inspiration for the cooperative movement at large. To this end a threefold program has been adopted. The first phase is research and publicity, including a statistical survey of existing societies to discover the extent of Christian participation in them, and an intensive study of certain typical societies to discover the spiritual qualities essential to successful cooperative organization, and the means of inculcating that spirit in the lives of cooperators as well as in the total work of the cooperative societies. The second phase is education in cooperatives with special emphasis on deepening in promoters and cooperators awareness of the spiritual basis of cooperation; and in church leaders, awareness of the fact that an adequate spiritual basis can be found only in the Christian ethos and that a truly Christian social and economic order can come about only through genuine cooperation. The third phase is to be a "Cooperative Community Experiment," that is, a demonstration rural community, Christian in spirit, cooperative in practice, and having the organized church as its chief center of inspiration and guidance. The West China Conference of the Methodist (Episcopal) Church will cooperate with the National Christian Council in this experiment. Pishan, a Methodist out-station, has been chosen as the location. It is the natural center of a rural community near Chungking. The Honan Mission of the United Church of Canada has allocated the Rev. J. C. Mathieson, one of its missionaries experienced in cooperatives, to the Council's office in Chengtu.

These, then, are some of the outstanding efforts Christians are making in China today for the service of the rural masses and for the upbuilding of the rural church. We are seriously mistaken, however, if we regard them as the whole or as necessarily the most important contribution of the Christian Church to rural reconstruction. For the most significant contribution it has made and is increasingly making is one for which the Church received but little credit. This contribution is the able and devoted leaders whom the Church has given to rural enterprises that are under non-religious auspices. Y. C. James Yen is a Christian. The head of the Rural Institute of the National Council of Rural Reconstruction (successor to the North China Council of Rural Reconstruction, mentioned above) was trained in a Christian university, half of the leading members of its faculty are Christians. The directors of the Central Cooperative Administration and of the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives are both convinced, if not professing, Christians. The vice-Director of the latter was formerly a professor in Yenching University and a Secretary of the National Committee of the Y.M.C.A. Professor J. B. Tayler, an advisor to the Chinese Industrial Cooperatives, was formerly a Secretary of the National Christian Council; likewise, Mr. Fuliang Chang who has done splendid work as director of the Kiangsi rural service centers under the Ministry of Economic Affairs. The leaders of the New Life Movement, which is rapidly extending its services into the rural districts, are earnest Christians. The above examples are sufficient indication of the Christian influence permeating the rural reconstruction movement. By sharing the responsibility for the uplift of the rural masses, Christians are in a very real sense practicing the teaching of their Master, "Ye are the salt of the earth."

For the Chinese Church itself, this close collaboration between the Christian and rural reconstruction movements has a significance that is as yet only partially understood. In spite of its hundred years in China--several hundred years when Catholic history is taken into consideration--Christianity has not been assimilated into Chinese life. The rural movement now recognizes the Church as an integral part of itself, nay, as an indispensable factor in the realization of its purpose! It is the first indigenous movement to draw the Church from the margin toward the center of China's national life. From the bitter experience of foreign aggression the new China is learning that there can be no salvation for the Chinese nation except through the salvation of her masses, and that the salvation of her masses is fundamentally a spiritual problem. For help, she is looking to the Christian Church. God forbid that the Church should fail her in this hour of trial and need!

Chengtu, Szechwan
April 1, 1940

THE MISSIONARY OUTREACH OF THE CHURCH AND RURAL PROBLEMS

At the enlarged meeting of the International Missionary Council at Madras, December 12-29, 1938, where 450 Christians from 69 countries were gathered together, one section of the Conference dealt with "The Church and Rural Problems." The following excerpts from its report will be of interest, in light of Mr. Sun's stimulating article above:

I. Introduction.

The Jerusalem Conference in 1928 focussed the attention of Christian forces throughout the world upon the special needs and opportunities of the vast rural areas. It challenged the Church to fresh adventures in rural service. It stated the broad principles upon which rural missions must be based and held up the ideal of a Christian rural civilization.

The past decade has witnessed everywhere a striking advance of interest in the betterment of rural life. Many important studies of rural problems have been made. Governments and social agencies are promoting large-scale programmes of rural reconstruction.

To the Christian Church has come a growing awareness of rural needs and the sense of responsibility for meeting these needs. Christian organizations are more and more reaching out in service to the villages. Rural missions is becoming an essential part of the world Christian movement.

II. Deepening Convictions and Insights.

Certain convictions and insights are being deepened:

- (1) The approach to rural communities through service which flows from Christian love and which ministers to human need, is essentially a Christian approach and a valid form of Christian witness. Such an approach offers for evangelism the most natural and fruitful opportunities.
- (2) The Christian rural community is a community not only where individuals are won to allegiance to Christ but where their every relationship is illumined and enriched by Christian faith and by the practice of Christian brotherhood.
- (3) Fresh insights into principles and methods of rural work are being gained. There has been new emphasis upon: the comprehensive community or parish programme, self-help with expert counsel, the central importance of the Christian family, the meeting of felt needs, simple methods of intensive work which might be fruitfully extended over wider areas, the development of small village and group organizations for mutual help and community service, the identification of rural workers with the life of rural folk.

(4) The implications of the rural problem for the whole Christian movement are being seen with increasing clarity. This is evidenced by the many efforts to adapt older forms of missionary work to rural needs and also by the group discussions at this Conference. The need for a thorough reorientation of the Christian world enterprise in terms of rural needs and opportunities is our next great task.

III. Recommendations.

(1) The Church must continue to pioneer, both in the unreached rural fields, and also in the old fields where new approaches and methods are needed.

(2) The idea of the comprehensive community or parish programme needs wider study and demonstration, until it becomes a part of the thinking and life of the rural church everywhere. The comprehensive programme includes: better agriculture, better health, better recreation, better homes, better economic organization, the widening of intellectual horizons, the enrichment of rural life through music, drama and other forms of the arts, the development of community spirit, as well as the vitally important work of Christian preaching and teaching, and guidance in worship, fellowship and service.

(3) There should be much closer cooperation between Christian institutions and a wider coordination of Christian forces if we are to do our part in meeting rural needs and in strengthening the rural church to fulfill its mission. Christian institutions for higher and secondary education, medical schools and hospitals, social agencies and larger church organizations should correlate their efforts for rural reconstruction and for building up the rural church. This would involve such methods as extension service to rural areas, making the results of scientific study and experiment more widely available to rural workers, and greater emphasis upon training for rural service.

(4) The enlistment and education of new types of Christian rural workers is essential to further advance. Men and women with a passionate love for rural people must be found who will dedicate themselves to life-long rural service. The rural churches need pastors, evangelists and women workers with a new vision of Christian community life. Just as important is the discovery within each rural community or parish of local workers who may be inspired, trained and guided in voluntary service to their own villages and society.

(5) Agencies such as the Agricultural Missions Foundation should be further strengthened to promote the cause of rural missions and to make possible the constant inter-change of ideas and experience between different countries. We ask the Department of Social and Economic Research of the I.M.C. to continue its valuable research into problems of rural communities and churches. Above all carefully planned experiments should be encouraged and given adequate support.

IV. Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.

The past decade has given us the ideal of a Christian rural civilization. We need now as a Church to see more clearly the implications of this ideal and to press on more vigorously towards its realization.

What are the spiritual and religious values that inhere in the processes of agriculture and in the social and economic relationships of rural life? What is the moral responsibility of those who till the earth to care for it and to pass it on inviolate for the use of succeeding generations? What is the relevance of Christian principles to rural economy and rural social organization? If the earth is the table of the Lord, what shall we say to the fact that some of His guests have too little and some too much of His bounteous provisions for physical needs? What is the place of the machine, of village industries, of cooperative societies, of medicine and hygiene in a Christian rural civilization? What is the relation of rural society to world peace? How may the Christian message of God's redeeming love in Christ be best translated into the language of rural peoples and speak to their physical, mental, social and spiritual needs?

These questions demand that Christians everywhere should engage in more earnest study and adventure so that we may find and fulfill God's purpose for His children upon the soil.